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COLUMBUS AND THE MEN OF PALOS.

BY JOHN GILMARY SHEA.

THE little Spanish town of Palos, which receives scanty mention in the pages of the historian, the geographer, or the traveller, owes a temporary lustre to the great voyage of Christopher Columbus, which revealed to Europe a new world. In the history of that illustrious and unfortunate discoverer it assumes a prominence that raises it from obscurity.

Palos and its people deserve the credit of having previously opened for the explorer the way to a successful consideration of his project at the Court of Ferdinand and Isabella ; and when Columbus came vested with authority from the Catholic sovereigns, Palos has the additional credit of having afforded him the men and the means, without which it would have been impossible for him to make the experimental voyage.

Nay more, there are strong indications that in the experiences of the men of Palos, he had read more of the mysteries of the great ocean than he had gleaned from the *Imago Mundi* or from Solinus and the other works over which he had pored ; and that he there added to the store of indications which he had gathered as evidences of a continent within sailing distance westward.

Palos was at that time a busy port, with a long street of Santa Maria la Rabida leading to a rocky pine-clad promontory crowned with a Franciscan convent, from whose roof and dome a panorama of land and ocean met the eye, stretching away northward beyond the frontier of Portugal.

The town had its men of means, owners of vessels that plied on the ocean and the Mediterranean, traders in peace, and when the tocsin of war sounded, ready to cope with Moslem or Portuguese or Frenchman.

It lived and prospered by the sea, and its inhabitants looked to the ocean for their gain and prosperity. Naturally everything relating to navigation was a matter of study, and as naturally the convent of Santa Maria la Rabida felt the influence.

As such houses were generally in those times, this convent not only afforded religious guidance and comfort to the people, but was at once the hostelry, hospital, and school for the town near it, and we may well suppose that there was always in the community of gray-robed religious, some friar versed in the learning most required by the people of a seaport town, cosmography, astronomy, and navigation.

No picture is more vividly impressed on our minds from childhood than that of Christopher Columbus, knocking at the portal of this convent of Santa Maria la Rabida in 1485, to ask shelter for himself and his son Diego. But to those who have studied his life, it is an unsettled question how or why he came to this spot. He had just left the Court of Portugal after his long and fruitless efforts to induce the king to send him out on a voyage of discovery, and after advantage had been taken of his statements, by sending out a surreptitious expedition.

Having determined to lay his plans before the Spanish Court, which was then at Cordova, Columbus was on his way to that city, but the convent of La Rabida was not on his direct route.

The port of Palos and the reputation of its pilots and captains could not have been unknown to Columbus. Pedro Correa, who had married a sister of his late wife, lived hard by at Huelva; and if this gentleman was not also known as Muliar, Columbus had another kinsman of that name in this immediate vicinity.

He had therefore friends in this part of the peninsula, but he was destined to find in this modest and secluded convent near Palos, some of the most influential friends he ever had, disinterested men, ready to support his theory as to a voyage westward and to aid him at court to secure its fulfilment.

From the convent of La Rabida you now look down on vineyards and stretches of sand, on the river Tinto and on the Odiel. The little hamlet of Palos, with its few laborers and vineyard men, is hidden from the sight. The little city of mariners and merchants has vanished. There is no semblance of a seaport, and the thriving city which the monarchs of Spain in the fifteenth century could order to furnish and equip caravels for a long voyage, does not in the nineteenth century possess even a fishing-smack. The ruins of a lighthouse alone suggest that ships once frequented its waters.

In the days of Columbus it had all the bustle of a seaport town, and adventurous mariners trod its streets who could recount voyages on all known seas.

When the wayfarer at the convent in 1485 began to talk to his friar hosts of his project of sailing westward till he reached Asia, he found more ready listeners than he had met at the Court of Portugal. To the Franciscan friars of La Rabida there was nothing very startling or impracticable in the theories and projects of Columbus. Two of the religious took especial interest in him. Father Antonio de Marchena was an "astrologer," as a student of astronomy was then styled. To him the theory of Columbus presented no scientific difficulties; and as to the practical test, there was a witness in Palos who declared it feasible.

Such a voyage out into the ocean had already been attempted, and clear-headed mariners in Palos believed it could be made successfully. Had not Martin Alonzo Pinzon, the wealthiest ship-owner in the town below, talked in the same strain, and had he not brought from Rome accounts of a *Mapa Mundi* and of books in the Pontifical Library, that told of land beyond the ocean? Had not Pedro de Velasco, a citizen of Palos, discovered the Island of Flores? Had not Pedro Vasquez de la Frontera, whose roof-tree they could see, sailed westward in the Portuguese service till the ship's course was impeded by vegetable growth, which seemed so impenetrable that the commander lost heart and turned back, though Vas-

quez sardonily maintained that he must soon have reached laud, had he but persevered?

The friars, accustomed to hear such accounts, found no difficulty therefore in looking with favor on the plans and projects of their enthusiastic guest, who wished to devote the wealth he might acquire to rescuing the holy land from the hands of the unbeliever. The science of Marchena supported the views of Columbus, and the heart of Father Juan Perez was won by the religious fervor of the Italian navigator. Though living in this retired cloister, he was not unknown at court. Queen Isabella had been his penitent, and had confidence in his judgment. Catching the Crusader enthusiasm with which Columbus exposed his projects, the two friars resolved to use their influence at court in his favor.

We can hardly suppose that a question of navigation and the sea was decided in their minds at once; or that it was not canvassed and examined by the aid of the experienced mariners of Palos. They could scarcely have ventured to present the project to the consideration of the court, without being able to declare that it had been considered and deemed feasible by the judgment of the practical seamanship of the port from which they came.

It seems almost impossible to believe that the projected voyage of exploration was not submitted to Martin Alonzo Pinzon, the most influential man in the place, to Velasco, one who had already revealed some secrets of the great ocean, and to Pedro Vasquez de la Frontera, who had already attempted what Columbus proposed. The voyage of this navigator under an Infante of Portugal, inspired perhaps by the very propositions of Columbus to that court, has been strangely overlooked. Yet the evidence of it exists in the documents of a lawsuit between the heirs of Pinzon and those of Columbus, which were examined by Navarrete, by Irving, and others, but of which a complete analysis has only recently been given by Captain Duro. The fact of his voyage is mentioned in the testimony of Alonzo Velez Allid, the Alcalde of Palos,

who says he sailed till embarrassed by the *yerbas* in the sea, evidently the Sargasso Sea, which is covered for hundreds of miles with a mass of the curious berry-bearing sea-weed, in which peculiar fishes dwell and build their nests. The same statement is made by another citizen of Palos, Fernando Valiente, and another witness refers to a conversation between Columbus and Pinzon in the very house of this discoverer of the Sargasso Sea.

Las Casas, who generally follows Ferdinand's narrative, mentions both the reasons alleged in his time for the visit of Columbus to Palos; that given by Ferdinand, that he was on his way to the Spanish Court at Cordova, and turned aside to Palos to leave his son with Correa; and that maintained by others, that he wished to question the experienced navigators of Palos, and gather what further proofs or indications they had met with of the existence of a continent beyond the Atlantic. Las Casas leaves it to his readers to decide, and with the light of the testimony, we cannot believe that Columbus, ever on the alert to seek out evidence of his theory, would refrain from questioning men at this place, especially one who had belonged to a recent Portuguese expedition. The piety of Father Juan Perez, and the learning of the guardian of the convent, Father Antonio de Marchena, as we know, aided Columbus in his final appeal to the Sovereigns of Castile and Aragon.

Columbus reached Palos utterly without means, as is generally admitted, and we have now evidence not only that he formed an acquaintance with Pinzon before he left the place, but also received sixty ducats of gold from that generous man to enable him to reach Cordova.

It seems, therefore, that the good friars and sturdy mariners of Palos gave Columbus hospitality, encouragement, information, and substantial aid. To it he owed the favor he received at court, and the ultimate success, when after the fall of Granada, Isabel the Catholic resolved to undertake the proposed discovery.

That Columbus selected Palos as the port where the expedition was to be fitted out, could have been prompted only by his remembrance of its welcome. But it so happened that the people of Palos were in the position of culprits. For some things done and committed by them, as the royal document says, "in our disservice," they were condemned by the Royal Council to serve their Majesties for twelve months with two caravels, equipped at their own cost and expense, whenever and wherever ordered, under heavy penalties.

Columbus had been ordered to sail with three caravels. Palos was thus called upon to furnish two of them. The order was read to the Alcaldes of the place, at a church still standing in Moquer, the Church of St. George, in presence of Columbus and Father Perez; and the magistrates bowed in submission, professing their willingness to obey.

But the accomplishment of the royal command was not so easy. The owners of vessels, alarmed at the prospect of a voyage of unknown length and destination, sent their caravels away in every direction to prevent their being seized.

The Queen finally dispatched an officer, Juan de Peñasola, to enforce her orders. After meeting protests and delays, Peñasola seized the "Pinta," belonging to Gomez Rascón and Cristóbal Quintero, of Palos, but it was found impossible to fit her for the intended voyage.

One vessel Columbus was to charter and fit out with the means placed at his disposal; with less difficulty he secured as this vessel, a caravel known as the "Mariagalante," or "Santa Maria," built in Galicia, in Northern Spain, and hence often referred to as "La Gallega," the Galician vessel.

But without the other two caravels he could not proceed. At this point Martín Alonso Pinzón came forward. He had already befriended Columbus; his influence alone could solve the present difficulties. There was some understanding between him and Columbus, by which he not only furnished the third caravel, the "Niña," or "Santa Clara," but equipped the "Pinta," gave his own personal services to the enterprise, and

summoned his brothers, kinsmen, and retainers to man the vessels. They promptly rallied around a man who was a terror to the Portuguese, of known determination and valor.

What the orders of the Court, and the sentence of the Council, and the presence of a royal officer could not effect was achieved almost instantly by the word of Martin Alonzo Pinzon—so great was his influence at Palos—an influence the family enjoys to some extent even now in those parts.

What was the agreement or understanding between Columbus and Pinzon? It was not committed to writing, and in the legal proceedings instituted by Pinzon's son, it is not made very clear. Las Casas, recognizing the fact that the fitting out of the expedition depended on securing the co-operation of Pinzon, says: "We must undoubtedly believe that he must have promised him something, because no man moves except for his own interest and utility"; and he concludes by declaring that it is very probable and near the truth, according to all that he could ascertain, that Martin Alonzo Pinzon alone, or with his brothers, furnished for the expedition a sum equal to that which Columbus had received from the Queen.

Without any distinct bargain he would thus be a partner, and we may well believe that Columbus promised Pinzon, as one witness declares, "half of all interest in the honor and profit," or as another declared he heard, "that he would share with him as with a brother."

Columbus fitted out the "Mariagalante," engaging such men as he could find, and his crew was a motley one, made up of men from all parts, not all Spaniards even, for an Englishman and an Irishman figure on the list, with Portuguese and men from various parts of Spain, but not a single man from Palos. They were evidently not a crew on whom much dependence could be placed.

But the caravel "Pinta," with Martin Alonzo Pinzon as captain, and his brother Francis as master; and the caravel "Niña," with Vicente Yañez Pinzon as captain, had crews almost to a man from Palos or the neighboring town of Mo-

quer, kinsmen or adherents of the Pinzons, men who had sailed and fought many a time under their command, and were ready to follow them literally to the ends of the earth.

The "Pinta" had, indeed, on board its discontented owners, who endeavored to cripple her, so that Columbus might be forced to abandon all idea of retaining her in his service, but after he refitted her in the Canary Islands all trace of this feeling disappears. From that time these vessels seem to have been more easily and contentedly handled than the "Mariagalante."

Accordingly, when on the 16th of September they reached the yerbas, or sargasso, the men of Palos, who had heard of its existence, showed no alarm, but on board the vessel of Columbus himself the crew showed great discontent, "mi gente andaban muy estimulados." As some say, they became mutinous, and according to Hernan Perez Mateos, a witness in the lawsuit, Pinzon offered to go with some of his crew and compel submission.

The signs of land increased. Birds known never to be far from land were recognized; pieces of wood and cane cut by human hands were seen floating.

As the sun was sinking on the 25th of September Martin Alonzo saw what he took to be land in the southwest, and his cry: Land! Land! was followed by his hailing Columbus and claiming the honor. Men climbed the masts of the "Pinta," as others did those of the "Niña"; all agreed that it was really land. During the night the vessels ran southwestwardly, and in the morning no land was in sight. Columbus and Pinzon had been studying a map, apparently Toscanelli's, and Columbus, believing the nearest land to be Japan, thought that they had not sailed far enough, and preferred to make the mainland of Asia.

Yet there is every reason to suppose that Pinzon actually saw land, and was not deceived, as Columbus maintained, by a bank of cloud. So experienced a seaman would not be likely to make so grave a mistake, and Las Casas, who was

too strongly attached to Columbus to be unjust to him, says distinctly: "Till night all continued to affirm that it was really land, and I certainly believe that it was so, because following the route they had constantly taken, all the islands which the admiral afterwards discovered on his second voyage were then in that direction—southwest."

Two weeks longer the vessels sailed on, making, however, less than four hundred miles, and then on the 11th of October, Rodrigo Bermudez, of Triana, a sailor on Pinzon's vessel, the "Pinta," which was in advance of the others, discovered land beyond all dispute. Las Casas in his Journal of the first voyage gives this credit fully to Pinzon's sailor; but the honor and the petty reward were claimed by Columbus, on the ground that at night he had seen a light moving in the darkness.

Up to this time the allusions to Pinzon in the diary show no feeling. Columbus indeed nowhere bestows any praise on his subordinates, and we, of course, look for none in regard to the services of Pinzon. But from the discovery of land which secured to Columbus his titles of Admiral of the Indies and Viceroy there is a marked change. A breach had taken place between the admiral and the stout captain of Palos. We have too scanty information to decide whether the fault lay in the arrogance of Columbus in the first flush of his new-won honors, or in the jealousy of Pinzon. The latter left us no account or statement of his voyage; but Columbus, in the diary of this expedition, speaks of the great evil that Pinzon had said and done, and in another place, alluding to him, declares that he "will not suffer the acts of bad men, of little virtue, who presume to do their own will with little respect, against a man who had conferred that honor on them."

Pinzon probably felt that his all-important services in fitting out the expedition entitled him to some consideration at the hands of his commander.* He may have felt, too, that

* "Eso merezco yo por haber os puesto en la honra en que estais."—Testimony of Francisco Medel, as to Pinzon's reply to Columbus.

his own claim to have first discovered land, and the still better established claim of one of his seamen, had been unjustly set aside.

Some time after, according to Las Casas, in November, or as others say, in October, he parted company with Columbus, unintentionally as he declared, mutinously as his commander maintained. It was not till the 10th of January, nearly two weeks after the grounding and loss of the "Mariagalante," that he rejoined the admiral, who was continuing his explorations in the "Niña."

They sailed for Europe in company, but in a storm the "Pinta" again parted company with the "Niña," and the caravels reached the peninsula at different points,—the "Niña" at Lisbon, the "Pinta" at Báyona in Galicia. Each then proceeded to Palos; Columbus in the "Niña," commanded by Vicente Yañez Pinzon, entered that harbor on the 15th of March, and later on the same day the "Pinta" also arrived, her commander broken in health and spirits.

The two Palos vessels thus returned in safety, after a voyage of nearly seven months, and their captains and crews long mourned as lost, were all restored to their homes and kindred. Not a single man of Palos was left in the fort on the Island of Santo Domingo, the garrison having been made up from the crew of the "Mariagalante."

Pinzon was conveyed from his house to the convent of La Rabida, where he sank rapidly in spite of the care of the friars, and when a messenger came from Queen Isabella to summon him to the court to make his report of the voyage, the staunch old captain of Palos had breathed his last, and his body was already doubtless committed to the earth in the little cemetery of Santa Maria de la Rabida.

During his stay at Palos Columbus was for at least a part of the time in the house of Martin Alonzo Pinzon and also at the convent. We can infer from this, at least, that a complete reconciliation took place. The friars, Father Juan Perez and Antonio de Marchena, friends of both, doubtless effected this

restoration of friendly feelings between the two men, whom they respected.

From this time Pinzon and the men of Palos were consigned to oblivion. No reward, no honor, was paid to the men who had volunteered to carry out the expedition, when the powers at the command of Columbus had failed, and he was utterly without means to effect his project, but was on the point of disastrous defeat.

It was not till the Spanish monarchs finding themselves hampered by the powers granted to Columbus, when the discovery itself was doubtful, and the extent of the New World unknown, thought of the unrewarded services of Pinzon and his brothers. The grant of a coat of arms to their descendants, by the Emperor Charles V., acknowledged rather than paid the debt; and though the suit in behalf of the heirs of the Pinzons against the heirs of Columbus had the influence of Government, it brought nothing to the ancient family of mariners.

A city in the north of Spain, for its gallantry in repelling the French, was once honored by making every one of its inhabitants a nobleman; Palos, where so many from the discoverer of the Sargasso Sea had contributed to the discovery of a new world, which furnished unrewarded two of the vessels and their crews for the expedition of Columbus, received no honor; her commerce was allowed to dwindle away, till the city which gave many of the best pilots, like Alaminos, the man who threaded the bays and inlets of the American coast, vanished, and the mighty men of the sea are in our day represented by a deserted harbor and a few vine-dressers.

The port from which Columbus and the Pinzons sailed is one of the dead cities of Spain.

A movement for tardy reparation has been made by Captain Césareo Fernandez Duro, of the Spanish navy, an active member of the Royal Academy of History of Madrid, to whose close, careful, and judicious study of unpublished docu-

ments, we owe an exhaustive work on the alleged expedition of Governor Peñalosa from New Mexico towards the Mississippi in 1662, and more recently the first full analysis and extracts of the Pinzon-Colon lawsuit, which had hitherto been so uncritically used in researches as to the voyages of Columbus.

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